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ABSTRACT

This talk has been prepared as a model for presenters when seeking the support and involvement of organizations and volunteers for the California Search and Serve program. The paper has been designed to permit easy additions and changes for localization and for meeting the specific requirements of the audience. In its present form, the talk is about 11 minutes long. Briefly covered are background on special education services and legislation, the problem of handicapped children who have not been located and therefore are not being served (it is to combat this problem that the Search and Serve program was established), the Search and Serve reporting process, parent involvement in their child's special education, and confidentiality. (DC)

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SUGGESTED LOCAL ORGANIZATION TALK

Note: This talk has been prepared as an aid to SEARCH speakers making SEARCH presentations and seeking the active interest and support of local clubs, organizations and groups of all kinds. It has been designed to permit easy additions and changes for localization and to meet the specific requirements of the audience. In its present form, the talk is about 11 minutes long.

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People are different. This is a very good thing. Wouldn't it be a dreary world, indeed, if we all looked alike, acted alike, said the same things, and had the same thoughts.

Men and women are different. In fact, the French say very joyfully, "Vive la différence!"

We are tall, short, fat, skinny, brown, white, black, big-footed and little-footed. Only other people seem to have big mouths. Sometimes we think very little about these differences, especially when these differences are not our own.

Take left-handedness, for example. When is the last time you remember anyone saying, "Gee, it's too bad we're not all right-handed." The truth of the matter is that most of the time we simply ignore left-handedness. There is a company located at Anaheim, California, which sells articles made especially for left-handed individuals--things like scissors, which ordinarily are made for a right-handed person. Did you realize that?

This company's catalog lists one hundred and twenty-five different items which are manufactured for the left-handed minority--because the right-handed majority has simply refused to recognize that not everyone is right-handed.

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I'm here to talk with you about other differences in people, young people, particularly. I also have some good news for you. And I'm going to tell you how you can help create more good news--especially for the friends and neighbors of our school district and community.

Just like older people, children do not all look alike. Nor do they behave or grow up in the same ways. Nor do they all learn in the same ways.

Here in California, more than 400,000 youngsters are receiving what is called special education services. Or another way of putting it is to say that they have exceptional educational needs. And exceptional programs are designed for them.

Some children have handicaps to learning which are very obvious. But others do not. In fact, some of these difficulties are not apparent at all, even to the parents.

There are obvious communication problems like poor vision or hearing, or a speech impairment. But the problem could involve a bone or muscular disease, a behavior disorder, learning disability, or an emotional or developmental problem. All of these can seriously interfere with learning.

The good news happens when a youngster gains the benefit of a special education program designed to meet his or her individual needs. This provides the opportunity to make the most of the child's individual abilities and to minimize the impact of whatever the learning disability may be.

We're making a great deal of progress in many, many areas of special education just as we are learning more about the mind and body, and how learning takes place in individuals.

We have the know-how to do more for more children than ever before. And it is now the policy of our state and of our nation to do as much as we

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possibly can to provide each individual with an education which meets the individual learning needs of that individual!

Not long ago we used to think that the education of those with handicaps was a matter of charity. Not until the present century was there any general effort by school officials or the lawmakers to provide an education which would particularly meet the needs of those with handicaps.

Today some remarkable changes have taken place. Perhaps more important than some of the advancements in medicine, education, and child care has been the new thinking of the American people.

We now realize that our future depends upon how well we develop and cherish our resources, water, power, the atmosphere--and our human resources as well.

We are saying this very clearly in the matter of educating our handicapped children and youth. We are saying it through the California State Master Plan for Special Education.

We are saying it nationally through the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, the Education for the Handicapped Act Amendments of 1974, and the Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975. All of this has been underlined by a series of very significant and recent court decisions.

The handicapped individual no longer receives an education as an act of public charity, but because he or she has the same civil rights as anyone else. And this education is required to be free and appropriate to the needs of the individual. An appropriate education must be provided to every handicapped individual between the ages of three and twenty-one by September 1, 1980.

Nearly all states now have laws requiring special education for children with many kinds of handicaps. In California, we have been developing special

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education for a very long time. When the state was only 10 years old, we had started a state school for the blind.

In view of this long record of interest in special education, it would be easy to conclude that we probably have reached most of the goals.

But this is not necessarily so.

How many children are there in California who are eligible for special education services but are not receiving them?

The answer is that we don't really know how many. Not all of the children in this category are in any kind of school or are receiving any kind of education.

And this is true all over the country. It is estimated that there may be one million school age children who are handicapped and who are not in school. In addition, there could be as many as three and one-half million of these very special children who are in school but are not receiving special education services.

Before it is possible for us--all of us--to serve these children with the kind of education which each one requires, we are going to have to identify some of these children. We are going to have to join together to search for them in order to serve them.

We're talking about what might be called a specialized census. Or a needs survey. Because not until we know who the child is, where the child is, and the exact nature of the handicap, will we be able to use our educational know-how to develop the particular educational program which is required.

Unless we know who needs what kind of program, and how many youngsters may be involved--we are wasting time, money, and young human lives.

So we SEARCH--for individuals with special education needs.

And so I'm very pleased to invite your group--and each one of you as an individual--to join SEARCH. Let me assure you that your help is needed. I'll give you the details right now.

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First, I'll explain the SEARCH procedure which will be followed. Our task is to identify any individual--from the baby to anyone through the age of 21 years--who may be in need of special education services and is not receiving them.

The identification, first of all, can be made by a parent. The Search and Serve brochure includes a reporting form, like a coupon, which can be filled out, removed from the folder and mailed. The whole business takes less than 60 seconds.

You can help most by getting the parent to fill out and mail the form. This starts the action. Or, you can fill out one of these forms yourself. You may not even have the child's name or age--just the address. Send whatever you have. The school will do the rest.

Suppose you don't have a form to send in. That's okay, too. Simply make one telephone call. Call your local public school. This all-important identification and reporting job, once accomplished, makes it possible to plan for special education programs, to meet the specific needs, to establish priorities for service, to give personal attention to help each individual, and, of course, makes your effort very worthwhile. The delivery of special education services includes screening to generally identify the educational and related needs of the individual. This is followed up with a more comprehensive diagnosis which is called an "assessment". Once it has been determined that special education is required, an individual program is developed to best meet the needs of the child.

Now we come to two more points which are extremely important for you to know--and, particularly, for you to report to parents:

First, the parent becomes a full partner in the entire process. Nothing is done without the parent's understanding and permission. Some parents of
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handicapped children tend to be very much afraid that something might happen which would result in a bad situation. They believe they might be separated from the child or that others may not be able to understand the full nature of the handicap.

So parents need to understand that the parent or guardian is directly involved every step of the way. The parent takes part in the development of the program and must give personal approval before anything occurs in each step of the child's program.

The second very important point is that all of the information which is provided by the parent is held in strictest confidence. The law requires that the rights of privacy be protected fully.

Despite all of the progress which has been and is being made in medicine and therapy, as well as in special education, we don't have solutions for every type of learning problem. False hopes must not be raised. On the other hand, early identification of the needs will enable us to learn the full story of what must yet be done. It will benefit many, many children who are with us today as well as many more who are yet unborn.

The effort which we will share through SEARCH will be rewarding to us all.

We have many fellow participants. On the statewide basis we have the help and participation of those who work with the State Departments of the Youth Authority, Health, Rehabilitation and Education. We have the help and participation of statewide professional, youth, service and welfare organizations, and institutions of all types and kinds. And this pattern is being repeated in each community.

Your group can plan a very important part in our local SEARCH. I hope that you will use whatever communications method you have to inform each one of your members about it and to use your programs and activities to help reach our goal.

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We would appreciate having your formal resolution of support.

We have posters and brochures about SEARCH which you might like to help us distribute, especially to your members. As part of the program, your members can help identify, directly and indirectly, those from birth through 21 years of age who may need help. You can tell others how to report, using the brochure or phoning the nearest public school.

This is one of those rare projects which permit all of us to get together and work together for the benefit of our community, our state, and our country --and, most of all, for the benefit of California's very special boys and girls.

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SEARCH

Guidelines and Resource Manual

Prepared for the
OFFICE OF SPECIAL EDUCATION

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